



State of Wisconsin
Department of Public Instruction
Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DPI 2009-24

Monday, February 23, 2009

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Wisconsin Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired
to host Braille Olympics

Event celebrates the 200th birthday of Louis Braille

MADISON—State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster announced that the Wisconsin Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired (WCBVI) in Janesville will host the Wisconsin Regional Braille Challenge and the 10th annual Braille Olympics on Feb. 25 and 26 for students from across Wisconsin.

“This is a wonderful opportunity for students from around the state to gather together for events that test and hone their ability to read and write Braille,” said Burmaster.

WCBVI is hosting the regional competition for the International Braille Challenge. This annual event allows students to compete in Braille spelling, reading, writing, proofreading, and the use of charts and graphs. The top 60 finishers from around the country will go to Los Angeles to take part in the finals the third weekend of June. This year’s event celebrates the 200th birthday of Louis Braille, inventor of the reading and writing system used worldwide.

“These annual events offer students who are blind or have low vision an opportunity to display their abilities to read and write Braille in front of their peers from throughout Wisconsin,” said Dan Wenzel, WCBVI director. “I cannot think of a better forum to celebrate the birthday of Louis Braille as we celebrate the literacy of students who are blind or have low vision.”

Braille is a system of raised dots used by people who are blind to read and write. The Braille cell is three dots high and two dots wide. Letters, numbers, symbols, and punctuation are composed of the 63 possible combinations of these dots. The invention of Braille is considered one of the most important advances that allowed people who are blind or visually impaired to be independent.

The Braille Olympics consists of Braille games, puzzles, and activities for students of all ages and abilities. Items on the schedule include

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- the Braille relay, where students race in the gymnasium to enter Braille characters;
- Name That Contraction, where students show their knowledge of the short form words and special symbols used in Braille; and
- the Braille carnival with fun and games for everyone.

Wisconsin students have competed well at the Braille Challenge. Last year, Baylee Alger of Kenosha won his category at the national competition in Los Angeles, and Amelia King of Madison finished high in the standings for high school students.

“Our students, and those who go to public schools around the state, look forward to this every year. It is a chance to have fun with Braille, and to meet other Braille reading students,” said Wenzel. “The ability to read and write independently is an essential element for employment and the enjoyment of life. The system that Louis Braille developed in 1824 has contributed greatly to the many achievements and accomplishments of blind and visually impaired individuals around the world.”

The Wisconsin Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired is one of two residential schools operated by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. Located in Janesville, WCBVI provides residential, day school, and outreach services to more than 1,000 students throughout the state who are blind or visually impaired.

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NOTES: This news release is available electronically at http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/pdf/dpi2009_24.pdf. For more information about the Wisconsin Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired, visit <http://dpi.wi.gov/wcbvi/index.html>.